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From the Office of the Director of Health

Caution Urged when Canning Foods at Home

Canning fresh foods at home can be a safe and affordable way to preserve bounty from your garden, but it can also pose a health risk if done improperly.

“The most serious health risks with home canning are caused by improper preparation of the food during the canning process,” says department spokesperson Jaci McReynolds. “In fact, about 90% of the foodborne illness outbreaks and death related to botulism can be traced to improperly home canned low-acid foods.”

Botulism is a deadly toxin produced by the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*. These bacteria are found in the soil, water and on fresh fruits and vegetables. They are harmless while left in fresh air, but placed in the right conditions, they can quickly multiply and lead to a deadly form of food poisoning.

Home canners can reduce the risk of botulism by ensuring foods are canned properly. Some safety steps include selecting only fresh, healthy foods; choosing only jars, lids and seals manufactured specifically for home canning; and using a pressure canner.

The USDA does **not** recommend steam canners, canning powders, jars with wire bails, glass caps and one-piece zinc porcelain-lined caps. It also discourages the use of open-kettle canning or the processing of freshly filled jars in conventional ovens, microwaves or dishwashers.

Destroying harmful bacteria in home canned goods depends on the combined effect of time, temperature and pressure. The length of processing time depends on the acidity of the food, the thickness of the food and the type and number of contaminants that may be present. Generally the higher the temperature, the shorter amount of time that is needed to assure food safety.

The health department recommends that home canners follow detailed instructions provided in the “Complete Guide to Home Canning” produced by the US Department of Agriculture, which can be found online by clicking [here](#), or the University of Missouri Extension’s publication GH1452, available online by clicking [here](#).

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